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Marketing team sports events to different fan segments

Bachelor's Thesis in Marketing

A Literature Review

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December 2017

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1. Introduction

Sports marketing has not fully established itself in the academic world as it has gathered multiple definitions but not a decisive one. A commonly used definition is constructed by Shank and Lyberger (2014, 5) defining it as “the specific application of marketing principles and processes to sport products and to the marketing of non-sports products through association with sports”. According to Stewart et al. (2003) there is an irrational and rational component in sport consumption where irrational component “signals the need to provide experiences that enable sport consumers to identify with teams, and escape into a world of passion, exuberant ritual, and idle chat” and the rational component “signals the need to provide experiences that involve strategic analysis, commercial exchanges, and value adding”. Further on Sutton et al. (1997) argue that in current society the spectator sports have remained as a connected part in the descriptive role of the communities.

Fullerton and Merz (2008) create a model that examines the products and services inside these two product categories. Products that are defined as sports products consist of “spectator sports products”, “participation sports products” and “sporting goods, apparel, athletic shoes & sports-related products”. Non-sports products are “goods and services not directly related to a sport”. These products are further described in the below figure.

Table 1.
Products Sold by Sports Marketers

Sports Products
Spectator Sports Products
• The game or event itself
Tickets for attendance
Viewership and listenership on electronic media
Participation Sports Products
• Organized participation (leagues & tournaments)
• Casual participation
• Access to public and private athletic facilities
Sporting Goods, Apparel, Athletic Shoes, & Sports-Related Products
• Sports equipment (skis, golf clubs, & soccer balls)
• Sports apparel (hunting clothing, swimwear, & team uniforms)
• Athletic shoes
• Sports-related products (souvenirs, lessons, & refreshments)
Nonsports Products
Goods and services not directly related to a sport

Figure from Fullerton, S., & Merz, G. R. (2008). The four domains of sports marketing: A conceptual framework. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 17(2), 90.

The difficulty of marketing the spectator sports products, especially tickets for attendance, is under investigation in my research. As every game is heterogenic, the event can not be ever sold as “a sure win” or in more frequently-used words a guaranteed successful service, even though the experience is not solely based on the result. Sports industry is an exciting part of modern culture and entertainment industry being one of the most random as results may vary on a day-to-day basis due to sport being always a combination of skill and luck as calculated and demonstrated by Michael Mauboussin [1,2](#). Borland and MacDonald (2003) also found that the uncertainty of outcome has an impact on the demand.

Latest sports marketing researches have concentrated on smaller components that fall under the umbrella of sports marketing. Coherent examinations of the consumers and their motives have not been in the center of discussion lately. The revenue numbers that professional sports have been gathering in recent years at an increasing rate implicate that something has been done right but as the fan groups are heterogenic and viewership rates are going up, the need for identifying different segments and their consumption behaviors are beneficial to all members that could use this information. Underlying problem in professionally organized sports events is the consistency of purchases. Repeating orders in any means are preferred by all companies but turnover rates of new fans and entertaining current fans is a challenge especially in the context of sports marketing.

The traditional way of consuming sports is to watch the game in the stands. This way was challenged when television and radio enabled another way to watch and listen the games. Further on the steps taken in technological development and globalization in general have provided consumers nearly infinite options to choose how and when they consume sports entertainment.

As I have mentioned earlier my focus will be on the fanbase and the marketing actions directed towards them. I will first try to describe the typology and sociology of sports fans. These examinations are crucial for understanding the variety between different customer segments. From the chosen literature related to fandom in general, sports fans, sports event marketing and sports team marketing I will generate a segmentation of fans and their motivations. I will further on try to come up with a framework that possesses the ability to create marketing actions for each segment which will in turn provide the management a way

to attract people to the stands. My research question is: *how to market team sports events to different fan segments?*

In the current age of digitalization, fan's presence in the audience are extremely valued by the players and organizations as the core product is the game event itself. The consumption mediums provide more insight, e.g. player interviews, than what is available easily from the stands. This consumption does not however provide the "real deal" that is only attainable in the arenas.

2. Fandom as a cultural and social phenomenon

Cambridge University's dictionary defines fandom as either the state of being a fan of someone or something, especially a very enthusiastic one or a group of fans of someone or something, especially very enthusiastic ones ³. Fandom appears in multiple real-life contexts, Fiske (1992) claiming that it is "typically associated with cultural forms that the dominant value system denigrates – pop music, romance novels, comics, Hollywood mass-appeal stars - - particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race". Jenson (1992) argues that fandom can be categorized in to two fan types: those who represent mentally unviable means for their showing of fanaticism and affection, "the obsessed individuals", and those who express behavior vocally and visually but not in the same levels as before mentioned ones, "the hysterical crowd". She raised the question of why generally fans are identified as part of those two groups, but little attention is given to other groups of people who are indeed classifiable as fans. The two groups she is referring to are part of fanatic consumption.

Baudrillard's theory of object value system divides the process into four parts: use value, exchange value, symbolic value and sign value. "Heroes of production have been replaced by idols of consumption ('great wastrels') such as movie stars and sports heroes. It is they who fulfil the function of useless and inordinate expenditure" (Baudrillard 2016). Fandom, in the sense of being a fan of something, provides no use value as there is nothing practical that you obtain from it. The exchange value is what makes the fandom marketplace function e.g. you buy tickets to see a concert – money is exchanged for experiences.

Symbolic and sign value are the true manifestations of fandom. Symbolic value in this context represents the level that a fan devotes to the self-identity, the value given to fandom. Sign value represents the need to belong to a community, a fan group. It brings associations to certain group that the fan wishes to belong to.

Consumers can virtually be fans of anything and the variety of fan consumption objectives is bigger than it ever has been thanks to globalization and the technological advances that can bring for example music from Ghana to your enjoyment in just a few seconds. A movie, a

book, an artist, a game, a brand or a sports team provide platforms of consumption and fandom objectives.

But the level of fandom also varies inside fan segments. Characteristics between these fan segments also vary between contexts. However, the generalization that fanatical consumers display more expressions than other groups is true. Redden and Steiner (2000) summarize the various descriptions of fanatic consumption or fanaticism into four features:

“enthusiasm”, “zeal”, “excess” and “intolerance”. Enthusiasm describes the level of participation, zeal implies that fanatic is extremely devoted to the target of fanaticism, excess the amount of actions above “normal” level of fandom, and intolerance is about not caring about other peoples’ opinions or arguments about the target of fanaticism (Redden & Steiner 2000).

Fans display varying levels of dedication to their point of fanaticism. Every group have true fans and “fake” fans in the sense of their reasoning to be in a group. Some might be in the loudest section of a football match just for the sake of associations, the sign value. Their motivations are purely self-centered, self-identity supporting and not about the object of fandom. True fans are there only for the object of fandom.

Fanatic people groups are classifiable as brand communities as they revolve around a certain point of interest. Muniz and Schau (2005) argue that “a common aspect of brand communities could be the potential for transcendent and magico-religious experiences”. This is often the case with groups representing fandom.

3. Fandom in the context of sports

3.1 Becoming a sports fan

Sports have for generations brought people together. Frey and Eitzen (1991) claim that sport “combines the characteristics found in any institution with a[n] unique appeal only duplicated by, perhaps, religion” displaying “patterned behaviors, social structures, and interinstitutional relationships”. This realization has been noticed by scholars. Borland and MacDonald (2003) bring up two explanations as why professional sports competitions accumulate so much interest in demand of researches: the curiosity of sports where consumers, fans of the team, take part in the core product, attending the game, that is used by other consumers via other broadcasting methods and the economic significance whilst understanding “the determinants of demand for key decision-makers in professional sports and government”.

What is a fan? "A fan is a consumer of organized sport" (Hunt et al. 1999). This explanation is somewhat vague but still presents the basic ideology. However, the fan can be fanatic about anything or anyone that relates to or is associated to a given sport such as an athlete or a manager. The fandom length can be anywhere between one event (e.g. Olympics) and a lifetime.

Product brands are often displayed more vividly in a consumer's self-identity e.g. Harley-Davidson owners riding their motorbikes. Services are extremely hard, if not impossible, to present and even harder to recognize when looking at a person. One can't visibly present that they use their local down-the-street massage center's services, but they can still identify with it whilst discussing with other people. Underwood et. al (2001) have placed a range of diverse services on a line and propose that sports teams reap in high levels of identification (see figure X). Sports teams offer an easy way to identification e.g. visibly wearing team jersey's or publicly identifying as Manchester United fan. Crawford (2004) argues that “sport related consumer goods - - often constitute an important part of contemporary sport fan culture” and “for some their primary connection and association with sport may be through these”. It all comes down to the associations that are linked to identifying as a fan of

something and those associations are homogenous inside of the group and heterogenous outside of it.

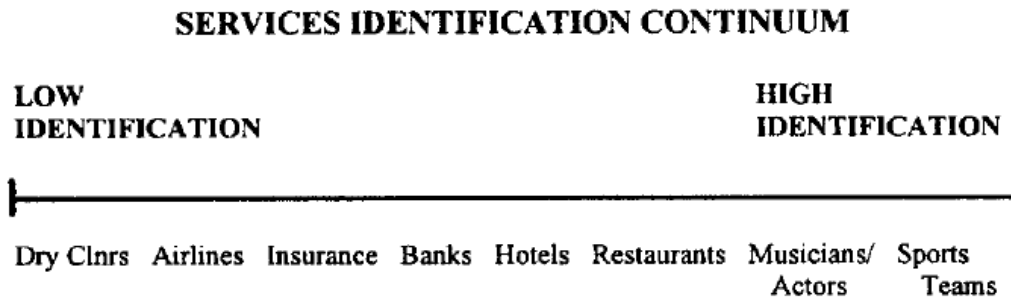


Figure from Underwood, R., Bond, E., & Baer, R. (2001). Building service brands via social identity: Lessons from the sports marketplace. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 9(1), 1-13.

Sports offer an easy platform to belong to a community. The motivation may stem from the actual fanaticism to a sport or simply out of the social associations that the recognition in a community gives. Therefore, there are different types of sports communities to be identified in the context of sports.

Belonging to a fan base gives the fan a “way of classifying themselves and others, whether latitudinally or hierarchically” (MacClancy 1996) therefore taking the concept of being a fan as a part of a person’s self-identity and acknowledging his/her efforts to socially belonging to that group. Social identity theory explains that individuals' self-concept is the cluster of knowledge he or she associates from a group to himself or herself in a level that explains the value and emotional significance of it, thus taking it as a part of self-identity (Tajfel 2010). Individuals in this context depersonalize themselves and shift the creation of self-concept from personal to social identity (Underwood et al. 2001). Branscombe and Wann (1991) further on add that “high identification with a sports team may result in elevated levels of self-esteem, as well as increased frequency of feeling positive emotions” and Underwood et al. (2001) propose that “fan identification is a manifestation of social identity theory”.

The extend of this part of self-identity, whilst complementing social identity, is derived from the actions taken to belong to a group, playing either a minor or a major role. "The need to belong [to a group] is a powerful, fundamental and extremely pervasive motivation"

(Baumeister & Leary 1995) and sports fanaticism is one platform that possesses the ability to do so, even without much dedication effort. "Sports fans consume - - because they enjoy the action of games and to escape from the routine of daily activities" (James & Ridinger 2002).

The sports interest is a production of stimuluses generated by surroundings. As a child you may have started a sports hobby because of your siblings, parents, friends or relatives are somehow associated to your point of interest and you wish to do the same as them. If no close person has any connections to the sport then the exposure might come from media coverage, local town heroes or even celebrity athletes. Further on, when growing up the stimuluses may come from your co-workers, significant other or a person you are interested of as they might be fans of something.

Often the earliest memories for lifelong fans have accumulated from being youth and enjoying sports in various forms with the people who are close to them. This may explain the cause – effect relationship of being a fan and further on explain the narratives that lead to the selection. "Customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong and unique brand associations in memory" (Keller 1993). Classic view of becoming a fan stems from these memories.

As an adolescent, possible restrictive factors to start a given sports hobby may be your physical capabilities, parents' financial position or even availability to practice the sport. Geographically some sports are practically impossible and unprofitable businesswise to implement to a given country and / or region. This explains the distribution of both active / inactive players and fans between sports and consequently explaining the intensity of a given sports media coverage. The result of this may lead to the person not becoming a consumer of the sport interest.

The experiences that we receive from the sport dictate fundamentally our mindset of how we feel about it in the future. If you have positive memories about the sport, the likelihood of you following it further on in your life is more probable. On the other hand, neutral experiences can go any way and bad experiences do not necessarily mean that the person feels the sport repulsing. The likelihood however is assumedly lower.

Hunt et. al (1999) describe in their research different patterns of becoming a fan. The process is described to either start from sport, leading to a team and ending to a player or starting from a player, leading to a team and ending to sport. These patterns are very generic by nature as there are other ways of becoming a fan.

Above mentioned processes neglect the fact that the devotion to a team might purely be about the player. This may invert the process when you are a fan of a player and the player is traded to another team. The fan might only be interested in the individual inside a team and completely ignore the other dimensions.

3.2 Different sports fan segments

Scholars have for years tried to come up with different sport consumer segments and reviewing the characteristics of those segments. The initiative of creating a universal model that suits every fan base, from any sport and from any country is challenging. This is because there are numerous factors that provide characteristics in any sports fan segment, e.g. the sport's popularity, the cultural differences between cities, regions, states and countries, and of course the sports in question. The underlying principle for sports team marketers is to conduct their own researches to get a clear view of their own fan base. Some generalizations are however applicable in multiple contexts.

Few classifications have gained the most visibility. Hunt et. al proposed a five-type model, that is applicable to all sports fan groups whilst Giulianotti developed a four-type model from a football context. Mahony et al. formed their four-type model through psychological commitment that defines their loyalty level.

Fan type	Characteristics	Example
Temporary	Interested in phenomenon, after it has ended returns to normal behavioral patterns (specific time-bound event), suggested to be the cause of BIRGing and CORFing	McGregor vs. Mayweather, Leicester City FC title run
Local	Born or located in a place that causes them to identify with a team/player (=schema), fanaticism peripheral object for self-identification	1. Born in New York, fan of New York Rangers 2. Living in Madrid, fan of Cristiano Ronaldo
Devoted	More attached than temporary or local to the team/player, fanaticism plays a role in self-identification, may attend games	Fan even if the team does not experience a winning record
Fanatical	Fanaticism is a huge part of self-identity, still other aspects they identify stronger to (religion, work, etc.), usual attendee	"Overboard" in their representation of fanaticism, e.g. tattoos
Dysfunctional	Fanaticism = self-identity, displays fanaticism in a manner that usually disturbs others, attends every game	Hooligan

Constructed from Hunt, K. A., Bristol, T., & Bashaw, R. E. (1999). A conceptual approach to classifying sports fans. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 13(6), 439-452.



Fanatical – Travelling Jäger's [Source](#)



Dysfunctional – hooligan [Source](#)

Temporary fans are often called as glory hunters and bandwagoners in social contexts. This is due to their nature of BIRGing and CORFing. BIRGing or “basking in reflected glory” is the cause of local fan groups, that usually do not associate themselves with the team, to start identifying as a fan and wearing their colors after the team wins a game (Cialdini et al. 1976). CORFing or “cutting-off reflected failure” is a phenomenon that makes low-identifying fan groups to disassociate themselves from the team after a lost game (Hunt et al. 1999). Even though temporary fans are weather vanes, they play a big part in gathering the focus from potential sponsors.

Local fans show more dedication to their player and/or team compared to temporary fans. However, their choice of fanaticism is location bound (Hunt et al. 1999). If the target or the fan moves to another city, the fanaticism dissolves. Therefore, it is crucial for the sports franchise to emphasize the pride of being a part of the city and rigorously market their own players, specifically the star players.

Devoted fans have been either temporary or local fans, but their devotion and motivation have deepened resulting to “breaking the boundaries of time and place” (Hunt et al. 1999). Hunt et al. (1999) further on argue that these fans are deeper in their identification because of attachment that causes the object to become a part of their self-identity and they neglect the winning records.

Fanatical fans identify even stronger than devoted fans to the object. For them identifying as a fan is “a very important part of self-identification” but they have some other parts they choose to identify stronger to (Hunt et al. 1999). Their behavior is more vivid, but it is accepted by peers as “it is considered supportive of the target” (Hunt et al. 1999).

Dysfunctional fans live and breathe, through and with the object. Violence and other socially not accepted manners are a usual representation of their devotion. They are not a desired group to have by any teams as they possess the ability to make the games dangerous and not enjoyable by other attendees. Hunt et al. (1999) also conclude that “too many or too frequent interactions with dysfunctional fans tends to decrease attendance at sporting events by other fans”.

Devoted, fanatical and dysfunctional fans spend more money on the sports products. The information searching is not limited only at the events as they usually search from sports related magazines, team’s social media pages and even player’s own social media.

Hunt et al. further on conclude that the fan can move up and down on the scale by altering their attachment level. This level of attachment is purely constructed by the fans themselves, but it can be enhanced and possibly altered by the marketing actions done by the sports team marketers through providing best mix of things motivating each group.

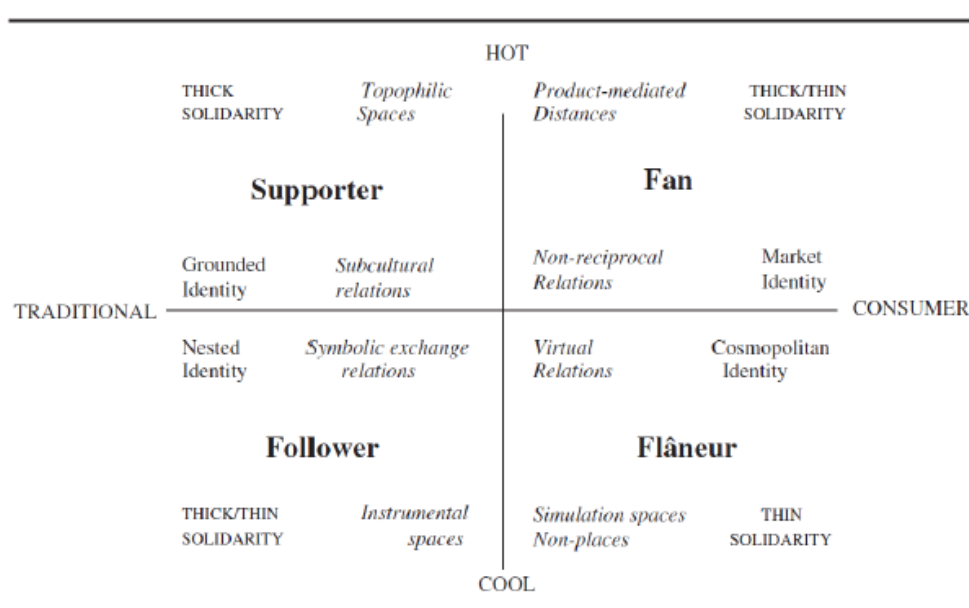


Figure 1

Figure from Giulianotti, R. (2002). Supporters, followers, fans, and flâneurs: A taxonomy of spectator identities in football. *Journal of sport and social issues*, 26(1), 25-46.

Giulianotti (2002) defines the supporter as a person who “has a long-term personal and emotional investment in the club” who may financially be a part of the organization but the true reasoning for identification can be explained through “conscious commitment to show thick personal solidarity and offer monetary support toward the club” whether it is about purchasing fan merchandise or buying a part of ownership. This group of people have taken the club as a self-fulfilling part of their self-identity, practicing personification of the club when calling it as “mother” and identifying as “sons” themselves whilst displaying “hot and permanent forms of solidarity with club/community” when they are in the stands. To them, the game event is not just a social happening, it is rather a necessity so that their self-identity may flourish.

Followers are eyeing the club, but the main focus is on the person inside of it, whether it is the player or the coach. Their solidarity level defines their attachment to the club and the stakeholder groups, fans in this case. They are prone to appeal “to more abstract social and cultural values” (Giulianotti 2002) and are at the games just for the sake of their point of interest.

Fans identify strongly with the club and enjoy the reality of star players. Club identification plays a big part in their self-identity but it is more distant when comparing to supporters. The identification happens mostly through the consumption of sports merchandise. Fans resemble those fan groups of other collective objects such as entertainment industry advocates.

Flâneurs are “in pursuit of a multiplicity of football [sports] experiences” (Giulianotti 2002). They consume sports merchandise as fashion objects and participate in consumption only through mediums such as social media and television. They also do not form social associations to the fan groups but rather concentrate on the team and its endeavors. Their identification to the team is purely a self-fulfilling part of social identity by being recognized as a fan.

		Psychological Commitment	
		Strong	Weak
Behavioral Consistency (Attendance Frequency)	High	High (True) Loyalty	Spurious Loyalty
	Low	Latent Loyalty	Low (Non) Loyalty

Figure 1. Loyalty Model

Figure from Mahony, D. F., Madrigal, R., & Howard, D. A. (2000). Using the psychological commitment to team (PCT) scale to segment sport consumers based on loyalty. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 9(1), 15.

Mahony et al. constructed a model based on psychological commitment and behavioral consistency. High-loyalty segment is naturally formed by those who have taken the franchise as a decisive factor of their self-identity and social identity. The salience of the team is narrated by their long-lasting actions towards the franchise and by their adamant behaviors, but their loyalty however may alter if going unnoticed by the marketers (Mahony et al. 2000).

Spurious-loyalty segment resembles high-loyalty segment in their consumption behaviors but “they are not committed fans of the favorite team and could drop out at any point with little dissonance” (Mahony et al. 2000). They also add that these fans “will stop supporting the team when something goes wrong” (Mahony et al. 2000) thus displaying CORFing. Their motivations to go to games vary from social causes to entertainment purposes.

Latent-loyalty segment is made up of those fans whose commitment level is high but their behaviors “are limited to more passive, indirect involvement through watching or listening to games and reading about the team in the newspaper” (Mahony et al. 2000). One reason might be that “attendance is price-sensitive” but further on adding that “degree of sensitivity differs between teams” (Borland & MacDonald 2003). They remain loyal to their team, but their behaviors do not benefit the team financially.

Low-loyalty segment does not show commitment to the team and causally does not support the team through “attending games or by watching it on television” (Mahony et al. 2000). Their motivation to attend games stems from other reasons, some suggestions made by Mahony et al. are that they attend games to watch the visitor team or merely one player. Their participation does not alter their psychological view of the game as a supportive event.

There are similarities to be found between these three frameworks and they are summarized in the below table. Hunt et al. were the only ones to point out hooligans, but this may be because of the cultural differences between authors.

Different segments from frameworks	Similar features
Low-loyalty; flâneurs; temporary fans	Low attendance levels, consumption through mediums, BIRGing, no social associations to fan groups, bandwagoners
Latent-loyalty; followers; local fans	Certain point of interest in the club, locality important, passive involvement
Spurious-loyalty; fans; devoted fans	High identification, big part of self-identity, high sports merchandise consuming, frequently attending
High-loyalty; supporter; fanatical fans	High attendance, self-identity and social identity, monetary efforts to the team, high loyalty levels

Constructed from the respective sources

Worth notifying is that these frameworks are unisexual by nature. Dietz-Uler et al. (2000) founded in their research that females do not identify as being sports fan as highly as men and that the identity of being a sports fan is not important to them. Males and females have different views of how they convey themselves as sports fans. Dietz-Uler et al. also argue that women would participate in such behavior as men if the opportunity would arise for them. Currently the coverage of sports revolves heavily around male dominant sports.

“Spectators of men’s games purchased more merchandise, wore more paraphernalia, and consumed more broadcast media than did spectators of women’s games” but women “were more likely to purchase merchandise, attend future games, remain loyal and provide more financial support” (Fink et al. 2002).

Limitations from these studies of female sports fans versus male sports fans arise when they are researched in their respective genders sports events e.g. female sports fans of female sports. As the number of female sports fans attending at male sports leagues is constantly arising, there ought to be studies trying to understand the motivations of those female fans.

4. Current state of sports markets

Professional sports are a very prominent market force. The revenues have been soaring in and new sports are added constantly to the portfolios of broadcasting platforms. Most recent upriser, even though it is vaguely by definition a sport, is e-sports. Supply must meet demand to further grow the sports markets, thus there are upcoming possibilities for marketers.

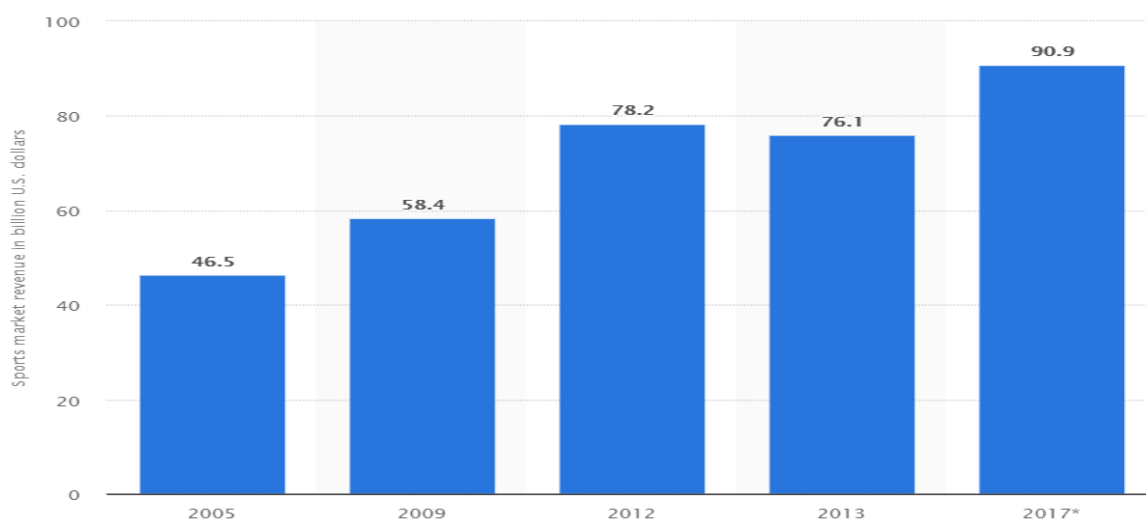


Figure 1. Global sports market revenue from 2005 to 2017 (in billion USD)

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/370560/worldwide-sports-market-revenue/> Data collected 24.10.2017

Only a fraction of sports teams' revenues come from winning the domestic or club world championships. The prize moneys are listed below next to annual salaries of last year's winning team. Worth notifying is that the winner club of NFL, MLB, NHL and NBA get a prize pool that is distributed to the players, not the club.

Title	Winning prize for the club	Last year's winning team's yearly salaries
UEFA Champions League	€57,2m *	€120,38m
NFL	\$0	\$163,9m
MLB	\$0	\$177,8m
NHL	\$0	\$78,4m
NBA	\$0	\$136,5m
Premier league	£38m	£114,6m

*Not including their play-off allocations or market pool share; Data collected 24.10.2017

If the professional sports markets were to work under perfect market situation, El-Hodiri and Quirk (1971) argue that all teams would be profitable. However, “professional sports leagues will exhibit no tendency toward equation of playing strengths” (El-Hodiri & Quirk 1971) as the franchises do not operate in homogeneous markets that would provide the same revenues to everyone and the whole point of equal sports field is against the very foundation of sport, the competition.

For the sports industry to continue its growth, the money must come from somewhere. Sports are entertainment for the audience but a business for the owners. This is the reason why some franchises have been terminated or relocated ³. “In recent years, franchise movement, or the threat of such movement, has galvanized fan identification into not only a social force but also a political and judicial force” (Sutton et al. 1997). Washington et al. (2001) further on add that “The competition among cities, states, and regions within the United States to attract professional sports teams has magnified the degree to which the sports field is an object of public policy and a potential cause of fiscal struggle and crisis”.

Huge part of a franchise being deemed as successful is when looking at the average attendance levels and the amount of revenue it can generate through its fanbase. Even though winning championships will make the team more popular and gain more revenue from e.g. raised level of awareness from potential sponsors, against common logic also a not so successful franchise, in terms of winning titles, can be profitable and popular. This is due to the connectiveness of the team and the community that is around it – enhanced by the marketing actions done by the franchise.

There are four stakeholder groups that the sports product is sold: “the fans, television and other media, communities that construct facilities and support local clubs, and corporations that interact with the leagues and teams” (Mason 1999). Biggest revenues soar from television and sponsorship contracts as they are the product of the visibility – desirability relationship for sponsoring a given club. Heere and James (2007) state that franchises with large fan bases are more desirable for sponsors, have higher viewership audience and sell more sports related products. Visibility is thus attained by having a large fan base and desirability through the success of the team.

5. Event marketing contexts of sports fandom

5.1 Event marketing

Event marketing and its goals are to offer the customers a platform where they can consume the brand, sponsors of the brand and the event itself with other customers. Co-creation plays a big part in events as the experience is shared with others who can make the experience positive, neutral or negative. Its product, the event, refers to the consumers “experiential consumption” which has four features: “experience orientation”, “interactivity”, “self-initiation”, and “dramaturgy” (Wohlfeil & Whelan 2006). “Event marketing, in conjunction with consumers - - serves as a valuable lever to engage the consumer - - via establishing community involvement” (Close et al. 2006). Shift from product based consumption to service based consumption has increased over years drastically and experiences have gained more ground in the markets.

Martensen et al. (2007) constructed a model for event marketing which is divided to two parts: “the brand route” and “the event route”. They found at that the “event’s effect on buying intention of the brand is created through a brand-related route as well as an event-related route” and also adding that “involvement in the event and the brand is crucial for the participants’ response to the event” (Martensen et al. 2007). Highly involved individuals, thus get more from the event and are likely to attend more often.

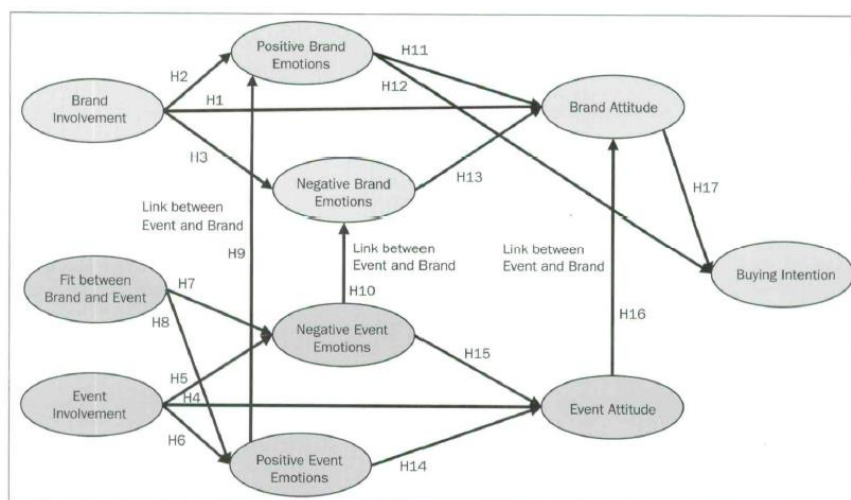


Figure 1 Conceptual Model for the Effectiveness of Event Marketing

Figure from Martensen, A., Grønholdt, L., Bendtsen, L., & Jensen, M. J. (2007). Application of a model for the effectiveness of event marketing. *Journal of advertising research*, 47(3), 283-301.

Hedonic services, such as sports events, also have gathered increasingly larger customer bases. The stadiums, referred as servicescape (Hightower et al. 2002) or sportscape (Hill & Green 2000), play a vital part in experiencing the event. Elements of the sportscape that Hill and Green (2000) mention are parking, cleanliness, food & beverages, crowdedness, fan control and spent time.

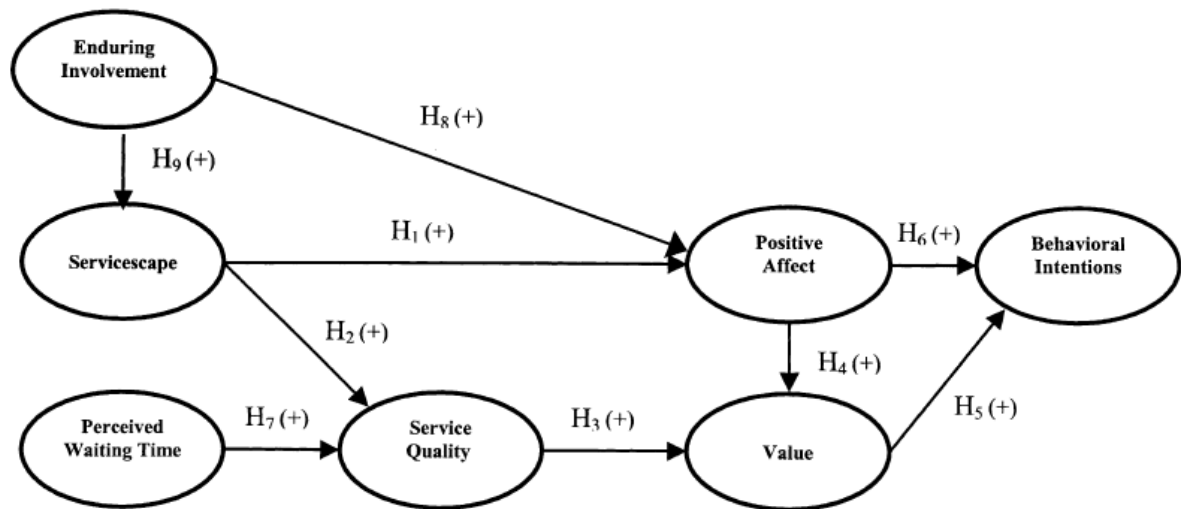


Fig. 1. The research model.

Figure from Hightower, R., Brady, M. K., & Baker, T. L. (2002). Investigating the role of the physical environment in hedonic service consumption: an exploratory study of sporting events. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(9), 697-707.

Hightower et al. (2000) found out from their research that “the results highlight the importance of the servicescape as it relates to the quality of sports experience perceptions, positive effect, and the level of involvement with the sports experience”. Hill and Green (2000) also noticed that the state of sportscape “can enhance the likelihood that supporters of the home team will attend future games”. Therefore, efforts towards the designing of servicescape are crucial. Hill and Green (2000) also found out that the higher the team is currently in the rankings, the higher experience the attendees require. This may be because of the expectations they have towards the team – ranking works as an indicator of the level of service the team ought to provide.

5.2 Sports-event marketing

5.2.1 Recurring events and unique events

The Olympics that are organized every fourth year, winter and summer Olympics are two years apart, and football World Cup that is also organized every fourth year are the most popular sports events as they gain the most interest and media coverage. This may be due to the point of the fanaticism being at the national level. Even though these events are organized every four years they are by nature unique events. Every professional sports league, that is represented in respective sports, is on a break when these events are being held.

Four biggest major league sports in the United States are NFL, MLB, NBA and NHL. In NFL there are 8 home games per season, in MLB 81, in NBA 41 and in NHL 41, not including playoff games. The frequency of these events is a contributing factor that causes some people not to attend at every game as it costs so much. They also provide a schedule for fans to follow throughout the season so that they have games to wait for.

5.2.2 Framework for marketing sports events to different fan segments

The basis of identifying to what segment the fan belongs to is to conduct a comprehensive research of the fans. This requires a database that enables to follow the consumption patterns. Currently, there is a straightforward way to follow what the season ticket holder's purchase and how often they attend. However, there should be found ways to follow how the other segments consume and how often they attend at games. The big picture is to provide specialized messages to these diverse groups about topics that are appealing to them and might make them attend games more often and/or purchase merchandise.

There are four favorable fan segments to be found and one segment, the hooligans, that should be avoided to attain by any means. The first fan segment, from the graph on page 16, are not attending very often or watch games only through mediums. Their motivation is purely situational, whether it relates to an ongoing phenomenon or a visiting team and its star player. Whatever the situation is, it should be heavily advertised to this group. Such campaigns as "the leading team is visiting town" or "come witness if the winning streak will

continue”, focus being on things not usual in consuming the games. Other ways to make the event more desirable to attend is to offer “packages to various groups (e.g. families, businesses) that may result in the low-loyalty fans attending more games” or “by selling the game to the low-loyalty fans as part of an entire entertainment package” (Mahony et al. 2000).

The second segment have one consumption objective they are most interested about. The main key to success in luring them to games is to find out what/who it is they are a fan of, possibly after conducting a questionnaire on site or through mediums. The consumption objective must be the central message of promotions to this group. Some strategy suggestions by Mahony et al. (2000) are to offer games at discounted prices / handing out tickets to games and increasing media coverage of the team.

The third segment are frequent attendees at the games. Their attachment level should be further enhanced by “promoting the attributes of the product or service - - with rational reasons why he or she should support the team” and “coupling attendance with support for a relevant social cause” such as Roosa nauha-campaign that progress their devotion to the team (Mahony et al. 2000).

The fourth segment are a regular sight to see as they are most likely season ticket holders. They are already loyal to the team and it “has become a significant part of their lives, and they are unlikely to change their behavior or level of commitment” (Mahony et al. 2000). Their attachment levels can be even more fortified by providing VIP treatment such as player meetings so that they do feel themselves as parts of the organization. These promotions “would both encourage fans to be more involved and facilitate interaction between groups of fans and players, which could enhance attachment” generating positive “word-of-mouth communication about the team and its activities” (Laverie & Arnett 2000).

As mentioned earlier, the fifth segment is the hooligans who are not wanted customers. “The sports marketer must take all measures to ensure that fans do not become dysfunctional for a number of reasons” as they are “threat to the other fans around them” and “too many or too frequent interactions with dysfunctional fans tends to decrease attendance at sporting events by other fans” (Hunt et al. 1999). There could be incentives to be offered to them if they alter their behavior, such as discounts. Hunt et al. (1999) add that

by adding policies that punish them for being a disturbance to others may convert them out of being a hooligan.

Some general guidelines when doing marketing campaigns are promoting the locality of the team, as it is a part of the city's community and "community affiliation is the most significant correlate of fan identification" (Sutton et al. 1997) further on fortified by Giulianotti (2002) as "the club is an emblem of its surrounding community, from whence it draws its core supporters - - the social and cultural impact of a club is always more relevant to local supporters than its unstable economic impact", "marketing players as role models" (Funk et al. 2002) to be more appealing to every group, and gain "exposure received via electronic and print media coverage and programming" (Sutton et al. 1997).

Also important is to mention the group spirit, the fan experience as it has such a power in the decision making of constructing self-identity and social-identity. "Sport marketers should not only promote the benefits of identifying with the team and its players, but also the benefits of witnessing a spirited contest and high-quality game" (Stewart et al. 2003). Sports events, being social gathering platforms, provide excellent means of human interaction on a level the fan chooses appropriate to participate in.

On game days, the messages on various channels should concentrate on "building up the opponent's strengths to the media to temper fans' expectations" as the "satisfaction with the service will be greatly higher when encountering an unexpected win" and as they will be "more upset after an unexpected loss" (Trail et al. 2003). Games are moments-of-truths for the teams and the result of the game plays a big part in future attendance intentions.

"Persons who strongly identify with a specific sports team - - report more involvement with the team, display a more ego-enhancing pattern of attributions for the team's successes, have more positive expectations concerning future team performances, exhibit greater willingness to invest larger amounts of time and money in order to watch the team play" (Wann & Branscombe 1993). Identification with the team will lead to "decreased price sensitivity" and "decreased performance-outcome sensitivity" (Sutton et al. 1997) and "identification with a sport team will lead to higher identification with other fans via social connections with other groups members, which results in greater well-being" (Reysen & Branscombe 2010). Also "customers who are highly integrated in the brand community are

emotionally invested in the welfare of the company and desire to contribute to its success” (McAlexander et al. 2002).

There should also be incentives for the various fan groups to attach more heavily with the team. These incentives should be promoted so that the customers, fans, know what benefits they are missing. It is hard to please everyone, but the benefits should be desirable to bigger audiences rather than niche ones.

6. Discussion and managerial implications

Based on the literature used in this bachelor's thesis I have recognized generic recommendations for campaigning the sports teams' events and segment-wise recommendations to increase their attendance levels. The created framework should only be used as a resource when deciding what marketing actions should be done as every fan base is unique.

It is impossible to construct a perfect description of a sport consumer because they all have different motives and behaviors that are heterogenic when comparing to others (Holt 1995). The fitting model to any fan base can be created when the team conducts its own research of their fans, find out what their motivations are to attend games and how their attachment can be increased. The larger the attendance levels, the more homogenic groups could be founded.

From the literature, there are multiple different segmentations to choose from. The challenge of selecting ones to be used in this thesis stemmed from trying to provide a model that could be used across the variety of team sports events. Multiple researches are case examples of specific sports teams and its fan bases, thus providing the most value to the team under investigation. Also, worth notifying is that different sports have diverse types of fan cultures. You can not expect to create the same atmosphere to a 1000-seated volleyball game compared to a 100 000-seated football game.

Managerial conclusions

Based on the findings and the created framework of segments and actions, I have come up with managerial conclusions. First, identify who your fans are and find out what motivates them to consume the spectator sports products, the games. Identifying that there are diverse segments that have different motivations and points of interest inside the service are crucial in understanding and providing the perfect experience to each segment.

Second, the motivations should then be fortified with marketing actions that "enhance fan's situational involvement, enduring involvement, and attachment" (Laverie & Arnett 2000) leading to more frequent attendance. One restrictive feature is that the identification may

be a costly process that can be done only by the wealthiest franchises. The segment based suggestions and more generic widely appealing actions are described in the created framework.

Third, pay attention to the service platforms, the stadiums, as they are crucial in consuming the experience of attending the games. Create an environment that further on enhances the core product as “quality of viewing does matter for sporting fans” and attendance being “responsive to weather conditions” (Borland and MacDonald 2003). The game can be enjoyable even in challenging weather conditions if the facilities are designed and organized properly.

Limitations of the study

Limitations arise as mentioned earlier when the research topic is generic. The amount of existing literature is sport and team specific research as it should be when creating marketing actions. The credibility of these studies to be used in a general descriptive manner are also questionable as the sample sizes in the conducted researches were relatively small that do not provide a clear picture of the fan bases.

Implications for future research

Most recent researches under the search word sports marketing are mostly about the social media’s role and brand’s role in the context of sponsoring in sports events. In the future there ought to be studies that are more widely applicable. I will now propose three routes that would provide a more comprehensive view in the context of sports fans.

As mentioned earlier, the studies related to male and female fans are restrictive as they focus on the same sex fan base following the same sex respective sport. It would be very beneficial to study what motivates people to watch different sex representative sports. Currently, the distribution in male represented sports are heavily male-dominant and female represented sports are female-dominant.

Second research could be conducted in a national level of a given sport. It would be interesting to find what similarities and dissimilarities there are between different fan groups of different teams. If there are regional differences, what explains them? If there are

differences, are they the causation of the team's marketing efforts or are they purely demographic based?

Third research could be about if there any demographic indicators that dictate the motivations of fan groups in each country. For example, when the Finnish ice hockey team won the gold medal in world championships they had a celebration event in the very heart of Helsinki but when Canada's ice hockey team won the Olympics there were not any events. What explains this phenomenon?

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